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THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF CHILDREN'S FAITH IN GOD

GEORGE A. COE

Union Theological Seminary, New York City

To the question, How do little children get their notions of God? there is a simple, obvious answer: By instruction and hearsay, just as ideas of angels, fairies, hobgoblins, Santa Claus, and of historical personages are acquired. This "acquiring" of an idea includes, of course, a complex reaction. Language has no power to transfer a thought from one mind to another, but only to stimulate a mind to think. The meaning of the term God, and of any affirmation about him, has to be construed by imaginative combination of thought materials derived from the child's previous experiences. Nor does the idea, once started, continue "in one stay," but items from the child's growing experience are read into it and out of it.

The idea of God varies, therefore, from child to child, and from day to day, according to instruction or hearsay, the meanings that words (such as father) have already acquired, the characteristic experiences of the child (especially his experience of persons), and his usual methods of association and of inference. A boy not yet four years old who had had difficulty with "bad boys" in his back yard arranged there a house for God, saying, "He'll keep the bad boys out; nobody else can." This "house of God" was merely a large doll-house with some additions of the boy's own devising.

When this child was four years and eight months old he spontaneously made a drawing, in which God and Santa Claus, a Christmas tree, flags, home, and toys, which include a locomotive engine on a railroad track, all figure. It is evident that this child, putting his own construction upon the words of others, had built up a notion of God far different from what his elders intended. On the other hand, the direct influence of instruction seems to appear in his argument with a playmate who had asserted that "If you do anything in a dark room God can't see it." "Yes, he can!" was the reply, "He can see you even in a dark room. He looks down through the stars, and I'm not going to do anything to get caught!"

Another boy of about the same age gave the following objective evidence of the Christmas story that he had recently heard. Of his own motion he devised for the entertainment of his parents and some guests a dramatization of the Star in the East. First, extinguishing other lights, he lighted a candle, which was to represent the sun. Then he placed an apple for the moon, and extinguished the candle in order to show that night had come. Finally, announcing that he was God, and was going to bring in the Star of Bethlehem, he marched into the room, bearing some sticks crudely fastened together with the apparent purpose of representing the conventional picture of a star's rays.

As an illustration of how the child's own social experience is read into his thought of God, the following case is instructive. "Mama," said a boy a little older than those just mentioned, "do you know what I'm going to do the first thing when I get to heaven? I'm going to run up to the Heavenly Father and give him a kiss!" Obviously this feeling-reaction to the idea of a Heavenly Father is due in part to experience in a human family.

Thus, both the fact that children have ideas of God, and the variations of these ideas from our adult notions are easily accounted for. That children really believe in God thus conceived is also obvious enough. They believe what they are told, and in this respect no difference is discernible between belief in God, in the Sand Man, or in the Black Man. The influence of mere suggestion upon children's beliefs is possibly more extensive and more prolonged than we ordinarily suppose. On a certain occasion, having

told to a group of children a story of how I had seen a chipmunk store food, which included a muscat grape, upon the branches of a fir tree, I remarked, "So there was a green grape growing upon an evergreen tree!" One of my listeners, a girl of about eight years, came to me some days afterward to inquire whether the grape really did grow upon that tree!

Just as children readily accept our instruction, so they willingly imitate our religious acts. The evening prayer, grace before meat, participation in public worship—these, under favorable conditions, are well liked; they require no compulsion. But they cannot, without further evidence, be regarded as clear signs of piety. Nevertheless, even such imitative acts may have immediate social value, and ultimate religious value. A certain family that was accustomed to have brief devotions at the breakfast table included a girl who was still too young to commit the Lord's Prayer to memory. One morning, just after she had triumphantly learned to count up to eight, she joined her voice with the others when the Lord's Prayer was repeated by saying loudly, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. . . . One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight!" I would hesitate to deny that even this crude participation in social worship contributed to religious growth. For the social situation was a religious one, and the girl's reaction, bare though it was of definite religious ideas, enriched her membership in the group, and brought her mind nearer to the meaning of the function then being performed.

These facts—the credulity of children's beliefs, the desultory associations that cluster therein, and the imitative origin of children's religious acts—go far toward accounting for the ambiguous or even negative attitude that largely prevails among adults with respect to the religious life of children. Besides, we are just now reacting against two types of religious work with them, the formal or catechetical type, and the revival or conversion-experience type. If these are the only practicable ways of promoting spiritual life in children, then indeed we must look for skepticism as to genuine spiritual life much before adolescence. It is not enough to show that children accept the idea of God, join in religious practices, and make an emotional response to revivalistic suggestion. The

deeper question concerns a life of faith properly so called. This implies not merely belief and imitation, but also emotional satisfaction and motivation of conduct without feverish excesses—in short, a personal realization or experience in a natural life. Does this exist in the small child?

This question precipitates us at once into the problem of the relation of religion to our instincts. For the life of young children, whatever may be said of adults, is predominantly instinctive; rational or deliberative self-regulation is only beginning to organize itself. We can hardly expect to find religion here, in any vital sense of the term, unless men are born with something that may be called a religious nature, whether or not we define it still more closely as a special instinct. There is no denying that recent psychology, when it is listened to, will disturb such assumptions as that "man is incurably religious"; that our mental structure includes a "vital spark" of divinity; that there is a universal "perception of the infinite" or "innate sense of infinity"; that there is a universal yearning for God, or a universal sense of sin; that infants, "trailing clouds of glory," have a gift of spiritual perception that mature mental occupations cover up and obscure; and that there is a specific religious instinct which needs only to meet its proper object in order to produce religious reaction. The same thing that happened with the concept of "conscience" is now happening with respect to the "religious instinct." No psychologist, I suppose, thinks of conscience as a special organ, or as preformed in a way at all parallel, say, to the grasping or sucking reflex. At the basis of my conscience, no doubt, lie certain instinctive tendencies toward sociality, such as gregariousness (pleasure in the mere presence of other members of the species) and responsiveness to approval and disapproval. These tendencies have made me endure social discipline, but they are not yet my conscience. The conscience of each individual is a complex of dispositions induced by specific experiences of discipline mixed with one's own reflection. The "religious nature" likewise presents itself to some psychologists as no unanalyzable endowment or preparedness to function in a specific way, but as an attitude or complex of attitudes and dispositions acquired in the course of individual experience.

Here, as everywhere, our mental life has a background of instinct, but so have politics and science and literature. In none of these directions do we find any fully preformed readiness to act in a specific way. Religion haunts men in the same way as any widespread social custom or expectation to which one may be exposed. Of inherent or constitutional religiousness, we are told, there is none; and there are non-religious men as truly as non-literary.

This prominent, though not, indeed, unanimous trend in the psychology of religion must be subjected to scrutiny before the nature and the depth of child-religion can be determined. This scrutiny might begin with direct analysis of children's religious reactions with a view to tracing out in each phenomenon the parts played respectively by "nature" and "nurture." A part of the evidence for or against the existence of any instinct must, indeed, be gathered by just such child-study. On the other hand, our special problem of the religious nature is so intertwined with certain questions of general psychology that the economical procedure will be to start with considerations that may seem to be far removed from the data of child-religion.

First of all, then, the science of psychology is at the present moment seeking to determine what instinct is, and especially its relation to intelligence.¹ There is agreement that the nervous system of each of us is so organized from birth that certain specific situations, without any previous experience of them, call out specific responses. Witness the shrinking of a child at the rapid approach of a large unknown animal. Here is an "instinct." Now, in addition to every such clearly definable instinct, there is an indefinite mass of what W. McDougall calls "general or non-specific innate tendencies,"² such as the tendency to form habits, the tendency to play, and many more. Here belong tendencies to generalize experiences, and reflectively to organize conduct into a consistent unity.

In the second place, psychology is at the beginning rather than

¹ *The British Journal of Psychology* during 1910 printed as many as five articles, by as many writers, on "Instinct and Intelligence." This was the subject also of an animated symposium at the 1911 meeting of the American Psychological Association.

² *Social Psychology* (Boston, 1909), chap. iv.

the end of the task of cataloguing the special instincts. An inevitable impression from the latest and most critical of all works on the subject, E. L. Thorndike's *The Original Nature of Man*,¹ is that the whole subject is still in flux, and that the chief part of what we need to know is yet to be ascertained.

In the third place, usage, even among psychologists, has not yet rendered the term "instinct" sufficiently precise. Baldwin, Stout, and Lloyd Morgan recommend limiting it to reactions that have "definite motor channels of discharge."² But some psychologists still apply the term to any native tendency, however broad.³

The argument of E. D. Starbuck for an instinctive basis of religion appears to use instinct in the broad rather than the specific sense. In religion as a whole, he argues, there is unreasoned adaptation, some of which is preadaptation, as if there were a special spiritual sense and foresight.⁴ But that this spiritual nature is a generic tendency rather than a specific instinct appears from the functions that it performs. Religion, Starbuck says, organizes and spiritualizes the special instincts. Hence, "the religious impulse, while given a single name, as if it were a single pulse of consciousness, is a compound." It contains fear, love, curiosity, self-regard, the play-impulse. "It is the struggle for existence and the will to live as these have ripened into an aspiration toward the perfect life." This Starbuck calls instinctive to indicate that it is a racial bent rather than an incident of particular experiences.⁵

In apparent opposition to this position, Irving King argues that religion springs out of ordinary experience, by ordinary mental processes, so that a "religious nature" is not required as an explanation of religious phenomena.⁶ The exact force of this argument,

¹ New York, 1913.

² Article "Instinct," in Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy*.

³ A recent example is S. S. Colvin, *The Learning Process* (New York, 1913), who in his list of instincts includes superstition, the love of nature and of solitude, and the aesthetic, religious, and moral emotions (pp. 35-37).

⁴ "The Instinctive Bases of Religion," *Psychological Bulletin*, February, 1911.

⁵ See his six articles on "The Child-Mind and Child-Religion" in the *Biblical World*, July, August, September, November, 1907, February, 1908, and January, 1909. The above quotations are from the article of September, 1907, pp. 200 f.

⁶ "The Question of an Ultimate Religious Element in Human Nature," *Psychological Bulletin*, February, 1911.

and the exact position of its author are not as clear as might be desired. The fact that religion does spring out of everyday experience, and that the process of its springing is describable in terms of general mental laws might conceivably suggest that human nature is fundamentally religious! But perhaps King means merely to deny that there is an ultimate religious "element" in human nature. If so, the term "element" needs to be defined. To this point I shall presently return.

The basal question here concerns mental structure as distinguished from mental function. Functional psychology, of which King and Ames are representatives, takes as its problem not, What are the elements of mind and how are they combined? but, What is done, and of what advantage is it? Of course the notion of mental structure is used *somehow* by all psychologists; it is simply inevitable. Even if, adopting the radical empiricism of Dewey and Mead, we regard "psychical consciousness"¹ as merely a phase of a universal evolutionary flow, we must still recognize the direction of the psychical current. That it has a direction—that the psychical variation is a determinate one—is witnessed to by the existence of genetic psychology itself. If, as radical empiricism maintains, neither sensations nor yet an ego can be retained as "elements," and "impulse" must be substituted therefor, still the implication of structure follows us. Impulses are toward something. Though we do not necessarily know that a given impulse exists until we have acted upon it, we do then know it, and the retrospective definition of it is, as far as it goes, a definition of structure. It is true that the old-fashioned easy explanation of mental processes by referring them to "faculties" committed the fault of making a concept the cause of particulars included under it. To explain religion by a "religious faculty" is as inept as to explain the civil state by a "political faculty." Nevertheless, Aristotle did not utter an empty phrase when he declared that "Man is a political animal." This proposition points to a law as distinguished from a mere incident of development. It signifies that needs and satisfactions

¹ George H. Mead, "What Social Objects Must Psychology Presuppose?" *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, VII, 1910, 174. Cf. his *Definition of the Psychical* (Decennial Publications of the University of Chicago, 1903).

are in this specific way different in the human race from what they are in any other animal species.

Both the change in our ways of approaching the concept "human nature," and the abiding meaning of such terms may be illustrated from the moral life of the race. We no longer think of conscience or of a moral sense as an innate endowment or as, in any way, a present particular possession of all men. The moral variations among men are too great for any such theory. Besides, we know that the life of each of us began at a conscienceless level; that the feeling of right and wrong has been awakened in each of us, and formed into a habit, by our individual experience of social approval and disapproval; and that our judgment as to what is right or wrong is also a reflex of our social environment, although, of course, the individual's own type of feeling and thinking colors the whole. But this influence of society upon the individual is only one aspect of the facts. Society does stamp its standards upon the individual, but society exists nowhere except within the individuals upon whom it acts. In last analysis, then, in the moral training that forms the individual conscience *the race is disciplining itself*. It is struggling consciously to regulate instinctive action, reflectively to prefer some kinds of goods to others. Now, such self-discipline characterizes the human race, but it is found in no other animal species. Here then is mental structure, human "nature."

Before attempting to say how the case stands with man's supposed religious nature, I must offer a few items toward an analysis of the most considerable attempt yet made to construe the religious history of the race without reference to anything religious in the make-up of the human mind. I refer to Irving King's *Development of Religion*.¹ That "out of which" religion springs is for him certain overt actions which have no religious motive. He regards "the reaction" as the "fundamental psychic unit,"² and he holds that "the psychological concept of stimulus and response" is "a sufficient basis upon which to explain conscious phenomena."³ I will not press the question whether here, as in the old faculty-psychology, a genus is made the cause of the species included under

¹ New York, 1910.

² P. 22.

³ P. 11.

it; but I would insist that conscious phenomena are not explained by any concept that includes in itself no reference to the specific direction that consciousness takes in its evolution. An actual response is never "response in general," but always a reaction of a particular kind. The stimulus, moreover, is never "stimulus in general." When psychology traces our developed reactions back to simpler antecedent reactions, it is under as much obligation as any other science—chemistry, for example—to seek precise determinations of the factors involved. To give determinate meaning to the formula, "stimulus and response," especially when mental life is thought of under the evolutionary concept of "adjustment," one must have some notion of the specific nature or laws of both that which becomes adjusted and that to which adjustment is made. Our present interest is to think clearly concerning "that which becomes adjusted." Let us call it the respondent, and let us say that the direction of the responses defines the nature of the respondent. To such definition each instinct contributes an item, and not less each of the generic tendencies already mentioned. Every persistent type of product, as music, or the family, or property, or philosophy contributes something to the determination of the respondent. And this remains true even when we think of the human mind as human *minds* having different positions in an evolutionary order. For the evolutionary order itself is an *order*, a structural phase of the successive respondents.

Does King's theory assume response without a respondent? If not, what sort of respondents has he in mind? It appears that the responses to which religion is traced are those of a psycho-physical organism. This implies organic structure, of course, one aspect of which must be mental structure. Unfortunately, however, King seems not to feel the need of explaining what kind of organic structure he has in mind. The passage in which he comes, as I judge, nearest to a definition of the structural concepts that underlie his whole theory takes a different direction. "Unquestionably," he says, "instinctive and reflex action is more primitive than consciousness or consciously directed activity. . . . Whether we are able to state with precision all the terms in the relationship between overt mechanically controlled action and that which is consciously

directed, it is certainly safe to assume that the conscious processes are truly of the nature of specializations within the primitive reactions, rendering possible the attainment of more complex results or ends. . . . Consequently, all such mental elements as ideas, emotions, and volitions, or whatever else we may choose to call them, are products rather than original data, a fact which must be borne in mind in all discussions involving them."¹ If we take this statement in connection with two others, namely, that "Consciousness . . . is an adjusting apparatus for remedying the deficiencies of instinct"² and that "Evolutionary science proves almost conclusively that instincts are not original, elemental endowments, but rather products, modes of reaction built up in the course of, and hence definitely related to, the process of organic development,"³ we reach, as King's ultimate explanatory "element" something below instinct, even "mechanically controlled action." I am far, however, from supposing that he really regards our mental life as simply a phase or differentiation of a bodily mechanism; rather, I should say, he is so absorbed in tracing developed functions to their more and more remote antecedent functions that he misses altogether the problem of structure.⁴

The same absorbing interest in the functional or response aspects of religion accounts, no doubt, for a parallel unsteadiness in E. S. Ames's treatment of "the respondent."⁵ Inasmuch as I have elsewhere shown that though he makes adjustment a fundamental conception, he leaves in obscurity his notion of that which needs and secures adjustment,⁶ I shall here refrain from discussing his general standpoint, and go at once to his treatment of the religion of childhood. He asserts: (1) that up to two and a half or three years human beings are non-religious, non-moral, and non-personal;⁷

¹ P. 39.

² P. 26.

³ Pp. 25 f.

⁴ It seems to me that he misses it also in his article, "Some Problems in the Science of Religion" (*Harvard Theological Review*, IV, 1911, 104-18). Describing the structure of mental reactions is not the same as telling "where the psychical comes from" (see pp. 111 and 112).

⁵ *The Psychology of Religious Experience* (Boston, 1910).

⁶ "Religion from the Standpoint of Functional Psychology," *American Journal of Theology*, XV, 1911, 301-8.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, 198, 209.

(2) that it is impossible for a child under the age of nine to pass in any considerable degree beyond the non-religious and non-moral attitude;¹ (3) that the child has no "religious nature";² (4) that "The social feeling of adolescence is original, inner, and urgent,"³ and that in adolescence "Religion arises naturally, being an inherent and intimate phase of the social consciousness."⁴ "For the individual, religion originates in youth."⁵

If all this be true, man has a religious nature, original, inner, and urgent, which clearly makes its appearance with adolescence. It is denied of young children because of their supposed lack of capacity for social response.⁶ If, now, we should discover that childhood is not set off from adolescence by any such social incompetence, it would follow that children also, in their measure, are religious by original nature. I shall presently endeavor to show that there is continuity of social growth between childhood and adolescence, and that this fact is of the greatest significance for religion.

The ground is now cleared for a definite answer to our main question: Do children have a really vital experience of faith in God, or are their religious expressions merely incidental, imitative accommodations to social conventions? A vital faith is possible if any one of the following questions can be answered in the affirmative: (1) Is there a special religious instinct which functions in childhood? (2) Is there any other instinct, functioning in childhood, a particular application of which constitutes a religious reaction? (3) Can the motivation of religion as a whole be traced to any one or more of the generic tendencies of human nature, and if so, do these tendencies function as early as childhood? To the first of these questions a negative answer must doubtless be given; to the second, a qualified affirmative; to the third, an unqualified affirmative.

One psychologist of our day, H. R. Marshall,⁷ has maintained

¹ P. 209.

³ P. 222.

² P. 209.

⁴ P. 249.

⁵ P. 214.

⁶ Ames's over-caution not to seem to attribute a religious "instinct" to primitive men suggests the possibility that I have taken too literally his statements concerning adolescence. See pp. 49, 50.

⁷ *Instinct and Reason* (New York, 1898).

that there is a particular muscular reaction, or group of reactions, that is characteristic of religion, such as the retractation of bowing and closing the eyes in prayer, and the larger retractions of asceticism. These he regards as the expression of a special religious instinct which has the function of repressing the individual in the interest of the group. Suggestive as this special-instinct theory is, it has failed to convince other psychologists. The religious reaction is too rich and various, too commonly joyous, to be held in these narrow bounds of self-repressive expression. Least of all do we find in the spontaneity of childhood anything approaching Marshall's description.

The outlook is different when we ask whether religion builds itself forth in any peculiar way within one or more of the instincts that do appear in childhood. The history of religion, psychologically analyzed, shows clearly the presence in the religious life of all sorts of desire, and so of all sorts of instinct. Fear, pugnacity, the widely ramifying food instincts, the social instincts, all these and still others play their part. But peculiarly intimate to religion generally, and especially to religion in its most highly developed forms, are the instinctive forces that make for social integration. So great differences in this respect exist between different religions and different levels of religion, however, that caution is advisable in the presence of the current tendency to identify religion universally with the social consciousness or with any phase of it. The most that seems to be proved is that religion is an affair of groups—tribes, nations, churches. Again and again, however, the worship of a group represents what is least social in its life—the worship of Kali, for instance. We must discriminate, therefore, between the social organization of religion and the social ends of religion. In prophetic Judaism and in Christianity social ends secure a unique development; they become, indeed, a ground of self-criticism of the religious group itself, whether nation or church.

The social instincts are therefore fundamental to religion universally, but peculiarly and supremely so to the religious structure of our occidental life. The question whether young children are capable of a truly religious experience becomes with us almost identical with the question, What are their capacities of social appreciation and response?

To what extent, then, do the social instincts function before adolescence? No one doubts that mere gregariousness (pleasure in the presence of other members of the species) and response to approval and disapproval appear very early, along with various less constructive social impulses, such as jealousy, and mastering others or submitting to them. But more significant than them all is another spontaneous tendency that makes its appearance in infancy, namely, the parental instinct. It is an entire mistake to suppose that instincts like the parental and the sexual begin to function only when capacity for parenthood has arrived. They appear long in advance. The attitudes of small children, both boys and girls, toward dolls, animal pets, smaller children, and various toys, are truly parental. Thorndike calls this "motherly behavior,"¹ but he points out that men and boys share the impulse more largely than traditional opinion admits.² Its instinctive character is proved by: (1) its universality; (2) the possibility of identifying its primary objects as a class, namely, smaller things thought of as living, and especially those that are helpless, lonely, or suffering; (3) specific motor discharges, such as patting, stroking, laying the cheek against, taking into one's arms, and providing food (real or imaginary) and other objects to meet particular needs; (4) a surprising confirmation of this theory that has been brought to my attention by one of my students. The evidence consists of photographs of two half-grown bluebirds, one of which is in the act of feeding a worm to the other. One of the pictures shows the two facing each other, one with the worm, the other with open mouth; another picture shows the bill of the first bird well down the throat of the other.³

This instinct has a far wider function than to prepare the

¹ E. L. Thorndike, *The Original Nature of Man* (New York, 1913), chap. vii. This is the most thoroughgoing analysis yet made of man's unlearned tendencies.

² Thus, small boys fondle toy horses, pray for them, take them to bed, etc.

³ Conceivably this act is imitative of the mother bird. But imitation does not exclude instinct. Rather, the object imitated may serve as a stimulus for an instinct. In the present case we have to account for the inhibition of an instinct act already become habitual (swallowing whenever a worm is in the mouth), and the performance of an entirely new, unlearned act. The whole is parallel to the act of a mother bird when she first feeds her offspring. There is instinct in both cases, and it is the parental instinct.

individual for parenthood. No instinct, indeed, is limited to the objects with which it has the nearest physiological connection. For example, the infantile way of seizing things and placing them in the mouth shows us the food instinct in operation, but the seizing goes beyond physiological appetite and becomes an assertion of property rights. Just so the instinctive parental attitude underlies much, perhaps all, of what is finest in social adjustments throughout life.¹ Just as imagination makes a boy's toy horse an object of parental solicitude, so also it extends the range of this solicitude upward to older persons. This, I believe, is the origin of filial affection. Small children pat and stroke a parent's face or hand, and when is a little one so happy as when he can play parent to the whole family? A boy of about four years, when his mother was nursing him through the croup, said, "Tell me just what you do for me, mother, so that when I have little boys and girls with the croup, I will know what to do for them." About six weeks later, when his mother had a headache, he assumed the attitude of physician and parent to her just as he had done to his own prospective children. Nothing seems to evoke filial affection so surely as being permitted to help father and mother in their household duties. Doing things for a child does not touch his heart half as much as permitting him to help you!²

We are now ready to see how even little children can make a vital response to the Christian idea of God. When God is presented as Father, it is, in my opinion, the parental instinct that chiefly responds. We love God by getting his point of view. In order to teach four-year-olds to trust the Heavenly Father, the Sunday-school teacher of today is likely to use as material, among other things, the care of father and mother bird for their offspring. How does such material lead toward the desired result? Does the child-mind construe Divine Fatherhood analytically by means of an

¹ Unquestionably conjugal tenderness has this as one factor. The term "baby" as it is used in rag-time love songs is in point here. More representative is Hamlet's description of his father:

"So loving to my mother,
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly."

² Cf. Patterson DuBois, *Beckonings from Little Hands* (1900).

analogy with bird parenthood? Or does an induction from cases of parental care lead the heart up to Universal Fatherhood? Far different from either of these is the emotional logic of a four-year-old. Central to the process of his mind is the fact that he himself instinctively assumes a parental attitude toward the helpless birdlings that have been brought to his attention. This helps him, by direct sympathy more than by analysis, to enter into the divine purposes. Without illegitimate stretching of terms, we may say that he "learns by doing"—he learns to love the Father by nascently performing fatherly functions.

But it will be asked whether there is not a filial instinct corresponding to the parental. Apparently there is no such second element. "Original nature," says Thorndike, "careless of equity, provides no filial instinct of return devotion."¹ Is it certain, however, that the lack of a second instinct spells inequity? Certainly the way that family honor, "standing up" for every member of the family, and especially resentment of every slur upon the mother show themselves even on the lower levels of moral culture suggests the presence of an instinctive requital of parental tenderness. It is not the naturalness but the unnaturalness of King Lear's daughters that strikes us in their conduct. How was it possible for them not to feel a motherly regard for their aged father?

What, then, of fraternal affection? Does it grow out of a special instinct, and does the love of my neighbor arise through an extension thereof beyond the family? Again it must be said that no second instinct seems to be provided; but only an ability, through parental instinct, to love all members of the family. One easily sees how this can be the case whenever a child shows tender sympathy with a younger brother or sister, or with any member of the family, regardless of age, who is suffering. But tender regard for an equal or for one older, stronger, and not suffering is less easy to construe. A. F. Shand's analysis of gratitude² as involving some realization of what the kindness of a benefactor has cost him, together with desire to requite this cost—this advances us one step toward the solution of our problem. We take a second step when,

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

² Chap. xvi of G. F. Stout's *Groundwork of Psychology* (New York, 1903).

with McDougall,¹ we note that this tender element in gratitude originates in the parental instinct, which is also the source of moral indignation. A final step, which no writer appears to have taken, consists in recognizing the parental instinct *in children* as the source of their gratitude, filial affection, and social communion. Our ability to love, which implies taking the interests of another as our own, is altogether bound up with the primal instinct on which depends the stability of the family.²

Whatever be the case with other religions, then, the Christian religion, the religion of Divine Fatherhood and human brotherhood, is the ideal flowering of a particular instinct that functions from infancy onward. In this sense the child is naturally Christian. To the Christian idea of the All-Father the response is positive, free, vital. Children love and trust him; they struggle to obey him; they desire to help him in his work; they are grateful for his gifts. This is Christian experience.³

Other instincts, of course, have a part. Fears drive the child to sheltering arms. Curiosity blends with the rest. G. E. Dawson infers from children's questions that the "instinct for causality" is a principal factor in child-religion,⁴ and Earl Barnes looks upon the insistent who's and why's of the young mind as signs of a theological interest.⁵ This interpretation seems, however, to be made under the influence of the outworn dogmatism that confuses religion with doctrine or philosophy. Whenever the causal interest is central in

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 66-81.

² A corollary for Christian education is that the parental instinct as such should be cultivated. It is worthy of inquiry whether the separation of spiritual nurture from the culture of the primary family sentiments has not already resulted in loss in both directions.

³ What facts of child-life did Jesus have in mind when he said that one must receive the Kingdom as a little child? Matthew's explanation, humility, is obviously a commentary on Jesus' words, and it is exceedingly doubtful. See Baumgarten *et al.* in *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, I, 168 f. Doubtless Jesus would contrast the simplicity and ingenuousness of children with the calculating formalism of the Pharisees. But does this go to the bottom of his thought? May he not have been impressed also by the high claims that children make upon life, even the confident, unabashed way in which they extend family feelings toward all the objects of their experience?

⁴ *The Child and His Religion* (Chicago, 1909), p. 38.

⁵ *Studies in Education*, II, 1902, 287.

the child-mind, the appropriate category is science rather than religion. This is the parent's opportunity to start the young intellect upon a correctly scientific analysis of the world. Religion gains nothing, but loses much, through the well-intentioned answer, "God did it," to questions that we adults answer to ourselves in terms of science.¹

It has been said that children must first think of nature after the fashion of mythology. Dawson even makes animism an instinct of childhood.² If this be so, the precept, "Never teach as true anything that must afterward be un-learned," is unwise, perhaps impossible of application. But I find no adequate evidence that small children are incapable of employing the causal category in the same manner as adults. Least of all do the facts indicate that there is a definite stage of spontaneous animistic belief in Tylor's sense of animism. Rather, we find a continuous mental movement from indefinite toward definite ideas, and from emotional thinking toward abstraction and objectivity. Not, then, from experience of nature, mythologically conceived, but from the experience of a present social reality in the family, should we expect the Christian idea of God to grow.

The view of the child's social nature that I have now sketched is different from the one most in vogue at the present moment. In the early manifestation of one of our strongest and finest social instincts, I find a basis for continuous social growth. But we are told that childhood is essentially egoistic, and that genuine unselfishness must wait for adolescence. This theory of moral discontinuity finds its support chiefly in the turn given by G. Stanley Hall and his pupils to the notion, long held, that the development of the

¹ To Professor Dawson's precious collection of children's questions, I should like to add this one from a boy of about five: "Mother, who was my mama before you were?" Lack of space prevents me from discussing the incautious use of the term "instinct" in Dawson's book, as "instinct for causality" and "instinct of immortality." The naturalness of child-religion, moreover, seems to mean for him that religion is preformed, even to specific beliefs, whereas the growth of mind is not primarily from one set of definite ideas to another but from the indefinite toward the definite. On this point, see Irving King, *The Psychology of Child Development* (Chicago, 1903), p. 243. An analysis of Dawson's cases will show that, though the children in question received little or no formal religious instruction, they were nevertheless under the influence of the religious ideas of their elders.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 32 ff.

individual parallels the evolution of the race. That *some kind* of parallel exists probably no one would question. Both the race and the individual show a movement from relatively unorganized mental life toward organized mental control; from immediate ends toward remote ones; from external authority toward internal authority; from the immediate data of sense toward thought systems. To this the new recapitulation theory adds the following doctrines: (a) That the natural development of the individual mind shows a succession of definite forms corresponding in motive, in content, and in date of emergence, to definite stages of racial evolution; (b) That this succession in the individual is pre-determined by a set of successively ripening instincts, or instinct-like tendencies; and (c) That the proper mental and moral food for each period is to be gathered from the level of the instinct then in action, and not from later and higher levels of culture. The popular interpretation of all this, and sometimes the literary interpretation, is that children, or at least boys, are different from adults in the same way that savagery or barbarism is different from civilization. Any boy who is not a social nuisance is in danger today of incurring the suspicion that he lacks boy spirit!

It is high time to ask whether domesticated boys are so unboy-like after all. At the risk of doing scant justice to a large subject, the present condition of knowledge, as distinguished from popular opinion concerning this matter, may be summarized as follows: (1) The doctrine of embryological recapitulation, which is the acknowledged background for that of mental recapitulation, cannot be assumed to be established.¹ (2) With reference to the brain in particular it does not hold. "Man's brain in general follows in its growth a course enormously unlike that by which it developed in the race."² (3) Where comparison between the two mental series, racial and individual, can safely be made, "what little is known is rather decidedly against any close parallelism of the two."³ (4) The sex instinct, which is the supreme case of a delayed instinct

¹ "The view . . . that embryonic development is essentially a recapitulation of ancestral history must be given up" (article "Embryology," by Adam Sedgwick, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., IX, 323).

² Thorndike, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

that affects the whole mental and moral life, ripens late in the individual but early in the race. (5) Further—and this bears with peculiar weight against those who have founded upon this instinct a saltatory theory of development—the sexual instinct functions mentally long before it functions physiologically. It is prominent before puberty; it is in evidence in early childhood.

If anyone should claim that, even though the theory of recapitulation be a dubious one, common observation of boys shows that they are different from men in the way already alleged, then the following considerations would be in order: (1) On the one hand, the arrival of adolescence shows of itself no power to produce unselfishness in one who has already formed selfish habits. Whether the social nature shall blossom out depends upon *general laws* of growth, such as habit, imitation, and social stimulation. (2) On the other hand, boys who from infancy have abundance of intimate fellowship with socially minded adults show capacity for social motives that goes directly against the theory. (3) The "typical" boy of recent writings on "the boy problem" is a socially neglected boy. He is the boy on the street; or the boy in a boys' school, away from the normal relations of the family; or the boy who goes to extremes because he has been misunderstood and mishandled. He may live in a good house, have plenty of things, and come of refined parents, and yet be socially neglected, that is, lack sufficient association with his elders to call out and exercise a boy's social capacities. Very likely the number of such boys is growing because of the changes that modern conditions are working in the home. In any case, the segregation of boys from adults, with its denial of a fellowship of ends, must have a stunting effect upon the social nature. (4) The theory of moral discontinuity derives its supposed evidence almost exclusively from boy life, scarcely at all from girl life. Why? In part, I have no doubt, because girls, being kept in closer contact with adult life in the home, and having more opportunity to do for others, develop earlier the social capacities that are common to both boys and girls.

Out of these social capacities, which rest ultimately upon instinct, springs the child's faith in God, a faith that may grow to maturity without any reversal of its instinctive motivation. But

this is only the beginning of the story. The human way of satisfying wants is peculiar. In other animal species an instinct comes to rest when adjustment has been made to the immediate physiological situation. Animal hunger, for example, can be completely satiated with appropriate food; but the corresponding human instinct grows into desire for possessions—desire that has no known limit. Just so, curiosity, the instinctive desire to explore things with eye, hand, nose, expands into science and philosophy. The social tenderness that originates as parental instinct, in turn radiates its warmth into all human intercourse, and then yearns for a similar social relation with divinity. Human instinctive actions, broadly considered, then, are not merely instinctive; there is an inner push that leads many of them to burst their shell. To be sure, there is continuity between the lowest and the highest achievements of humanity, but human life becomes as different from “mere” instinct as a singing bird is different from the songless egg whence it has its birth. This self-transcendence, which involves an immanent critique of our satisfactions, is elemental. It is no mere consolidation of instinct acts by repetition and habit, nor is it a mere complex of elementary instincts. We are dealing here with nothing less than an evolution of instinctive desire into self-conscious desire. We become persons by thus turning upon our desires,¹ and society in the strict sense of the term is possible to persons only.

Any adequate account of the generic tendencies of human nature will include this spontaneous movement which transforms merely instinctive satisfactions into personally and socially realized values. Here is where religion has its home in universal human nature. Religion originates in this human (personal-social) way of dealing with satisfactions. It is not limited to any one kind or to several kinds, of satisfaction; its values may be anything whatever upon which the heart fixes with intense longing. Nor does religion consist in any single method of realizing these values, but often in re-creating the values themselves. Religion is the keenest critic of the values upon which religion itself sets our heart; religion is the

¹ Cf. A. O. Lovejoy, “The Desires of the Self-conscious,” *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, IV (1907), 29-39.

sternest judge of the methods of religion. Here is something more inclusive than any mystical eye of the soul; something wider awake than any subconscious endowment; something more warm than mere insight. Here we have, not without arrests to be sure, the process, both racial and individual, of the creation of a personal-social world.¹ Faith in God, at whatever level we take it, is the construing of experience as *response*, and what is this but the effort to live humanly, that is, to realize ourselves as persons and as society? Faith in God, then, has its roots, just as our own personality has, in instinct, but particularly in the instinctive reactions that lead most directly to the organization of social self-consciousness.²

How this elemental thrust, which requires us to be persons in a personal world, manifests itself in the different religions and in the no-religions; how it suffers arrest in persons and in groups; what obstacles it meets and how it overcomes them—all this, for the moment, is of secondary importance. What is vital to our present purpose is to see that this element of human nature is operative in children from the start. It is not a postponed instinct but an omnipresent movement of the mind—a movement toward self-assertion and yet toward social self-integration; a movement toward instinctive satisfactions, and yet toward a self-conscious organization and transformation of them; toward objective analysis, yet toward a synthesis of experience in terms of meaning. Children's hearts turn toward the ideal world as naturally as

¹ E. Murisier in his *Les maladies du sentiment religieux* (Paris, 1901) arrives by analysis of religiously unstable minds at the conclusion that perhaps religion has furnished the central idea, the focus of attention, for the organization of personal life. At greater length M. Delacroix (*Etudes d'histoire et de psychologie du mysticisme*, Paris, 1908) shows how typical mystics have attained to mental steadiness, unity, and practical power precisely through their mystical experiences. Exceedingly suggestive, whether proved or not, is E. Durkheim's theory (*Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris, 1912, pp. 343-90) that the idea of soul does not dawn upon early man primarily through experiences like dreams, but through the individual's consciousness that he participates in Mana.

² Within the limits of this article one cannot, of course, adduce the grounds for this theory, nor even give a full exposition of it. In the near future I hope to express myself upon it more fully. In the meantime I shall be satisfied if I can make clear that the problem of "the religious nature" is a real one, and that its *locus* is the point here indicated.

toward the satisfactions of mere instinct. If the child-mind sees little difference between God and a fairy, the inference is not that the God-idea is missed altogether, but that the fairy-idea has for children a religious tinge. The anthropomorphism of childish thought has in it something universal. It is a first, crude humanizing of experience. Subsequently, as analytical thought grows, parts of one's world become dehumanized, subsocial, without obvious meaning. This process of analysis and abstraction brings gains of its own, but when it seems to command that we submit to an unhuman natural order, the human spirit is stung to a reassertion of the personal-social self. "There must be," says this spirit, "something deeper in the world than that, something that cares for values as they appear from the human point of view." To cling to this imperative of the heart, and to order one's life according to it is to reinstate the principle that underlies childish anthropomorphisms. Therefore the naïve faith of a child is continuous with that of adults.¹

It follows that the first paragraphs of this article give only a partial answer to the question of whence children get their ideas of God, and why children believe in him. Suggestion, imitation, and desultory association are certainly here. But to think of the child-mind as an empty receptacle, indifferent to what adults pour into it, is to misconceive the whole situation. Rather both the child and the adult who teaches him about God are working at a problem that is real for both, and the faith that they have in common, though on different levels, expresses fundamental traits of their common human nature.

¹ If this were an inquiry into the logic of religion, I should raise the question whether even the scientific mind really eliminates anthropomorphism, and if so what sort of objects science has left. My present point is merely that children's faith is of the same kind as that of adults, and springs from the same impulses.